

RAC NOTES

*Arizona Bureau of Land Management
Resource Advisory Council Newsletter
August 2004, Number 13*

Highlights of RAC Meeting in Yuma, AZ, and Sears Point Tour, February 18-19, 2004

On February 18th, a RAC business meeting was convened at the BLM Yuma Field Office in Yuma. Elaine Zielinski, BLM Arizona State Director, welcomed the group and gave a summary of legislation, regulations, and statewide issues. A synopsis of topics covered by Elaine Zielinski's report is as follows:

Grazing Draft EIS Public Meeting:

Comments made at the Phoenix meeting reflect that the cattle industry supports the grazing regulatory changes and the environmental community opposes the changes. Opposing comments centered on concerns that the proposed rule will not allow meaningful public input to BLM's decision-making process; the deadline of 24 months for initiating changes to grazing practices is too long to stop injury to critical resources; the 5 year phase-in period for livestock adjustments is too long to correct resource use problems; and water rights for livestock grazing do not stay in the name of the United States.

Report to Congress per Section 32 of the National Defense Authorization Act: The Act requires the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretaries of Agriculture and Defense, to prepare a report to Congress by December 31, 2004 which will outline a strategy to restore and

maintain the "sustainable yield of the regional aquifer" by and after September 30, 2011. Intent is to ensure the rate of groundwater pumping will not threaten the health of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area and the flow of the San Pedro River. The report will be prepared in cooperation with the Upper San Pedro Partnership. Either BLM or the U.S. Geological Survey will serve as lead agency in the Department.

Land Exchanges: BLM is currently reviewing several land exchange proposals. These proposals are being evaluated against BLM's land exchange criteria and consistency with existing land use plans. Once feasibility is determined, the proposal(s) will be sent to the BLM Director for final review and approval.

Deer Valley Rock Art Center: Two volunteers were recognized by BLM at a recent awards ceremony for their exceptional support of archaeological resource preservation.

Advisory Councils: The Gila Box Advisory Committee is soliciting nominations for 7 members. The Sonoran Desert National Monument Advisory Committee Charter has been forwarded to Director Clarke for review and approval by the Secretary. Once approved, BLM will issue a call for nominations for 12 members. Also, a call for nominations for the Arizona RAC will be issued in March to fill 5 positions. There is no prohibition to being on multiple Advisory Councils.

Next the RAC received an update on **Land Tenure Strategy and San Pedro**

Acquisition Program. Mike Taylor discussed the reasons for Arizona BLM's initiative to develop a cohesive strategy for land tenure adjustments. It is expected that BACA bill land sales will enable Arizona BLM to compete for additional dollars for land acquisitions. A Land Tenure Steering Committee will prioritize land tenure work across the state and establish a 5 year strategy. A RAC sub-committee had previously met with BLM State Office personnel on this subject and expressed interest in getting more information as the initiative moves forward. Next, Shela McFarlin provided background on the San Pedro Acquisition Program. Land and Water Conservation Funds are used to acquire in-holdings or conservation easements in the NCA to protect the San Pedro river eco-system (water resources, wildlife habitat, and in some cases public access). Acquisitions follow approved land use plans. Members of the RAC expressed concern about lack of communication from Bureau of Reclamation regarding acquisitions in the Cascabel area. Shela confirmed that a 30 day review of environmental documents will be planned for the public.

Next, Gary Stumpf provided a presentation on the **Arizona BLM Cultural Resource Program**. Gary gave an overview of Arizona's major archaeological resources which span the entire range of human occupation in the New World. He highlighted BLM Arizona's pro-active efforts and partnerships such as the Site Steward Program and Archaeology Month. There were about 7500 visits last year performed by 800 trained site stewards. There will be a series of events to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Antiquities Act. The State Directors from the Four Corners States are exploring ways

to showcase the rich cultural resources in those states. Preservation of cultural resources is facing increased challenges due to population growth, more recreational use, and more OHVs. Developing cultural sites for interpretation will require a commitment to mitigation and monitoring. Elaine Zielinski sees the commemoration as a way for BLM and its partners to do on-the-ground work and solicited the RAC's involvement in the process.

During the **Public Comment period**, the RAC heard from a Mohave County rancher regarding concerns about designation of a herd management area (HMA) for horses in the Cerbat Mountains. Mike Taylor agreed to work with the Kingman Field Office on the specifics.

Next, Al Burch, Renewable and Mineral Resources Group Leader, gave a presentation on the **Wild Horse and Burro Foundation**. It is chartered in Nevada and its mission is to help promote BLM's Wild Horse and Burro program. BLM and the Foundation are presently finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding. Members of the RAC discussed the Foundation's traditional focus on horses and need for more emphasis on burro issues. The RAC agreed to prepare a letter to Elaine Zielinski expressing the need for more equity in treatment of horse and burro issues.

Next, Bill Coulloudon, Rangeland Management Program Lead, provided an overview of the **Draft Grazing EIS and Proposed Grazing Regulations Changes**. The proposed changes appeared to have the RAC's support; however, members of the RAC were concerned about the lack of equity in treatment of service fees. Members questioned the basis of the \$10 service fee charged for processing grazing related permits and asked if BLM could charge a fee for processing protests

and appeals. Mike Taylor stated that these are two different processes. However, one member cited an example where the FCC charges a fee to file to deny an FCC permit.

Next, the RAC reviewed and approved a nomination for Thomas O'Reilly to fill a position on the Phoenix District Rangeland Resource Team (RRT). Shela McFarlin announced that Stephen Wood will replace Mac Donaldson who resigned from the Las Cienegas RRT.

During discussion of the **Field Manager Reports**, there was a question regarding closure of the Cameron allotment in the Phoenix Field Office due to the Sonoran pronghorn antelope. It was clarified that the permittee is not opposed to the closure as the mitigation measures were not conducive to his operation. In the Yuma Field Office, BLM continues to make progress on removal of invasive tamarisk in the Mittry Fire Burned Area. In the Kingman Field Office, there is an issue regarding a locked gate on private land which is blocking rancher/public access to an existing livestock water source. BLM has met with the parties concerned and is continuing to document the facts to help resolve the issue.

RAC Working Group Reports.

a. **Standards and Guidelines.** The RAC reviewed and approved a draft letter prepared by the Working Group to comment on the proposed BLM grazing regulations and EIS. The approved letter gives the RAC's support to the basic objectives of the revisions and offers some guidelines for BLM's consideration. The letter discusses the importance of incentives for grazing permittees to invest their resources into good management practices; the vital role of

rangeland monitoring as basis for grazing decisions; the importance of public involvement in the planning process; and need for BLM flexibility, once land use plans have been approved, to administer grazing allotments without having to revisit the planning process. The RAC also discussed the need for standards and guidelines training for new members and the role of public involvement in land use planning and implementation. This will be an agenda item for a future RAC meeting.

b. **Public Relations.** RAC Notes were published in February and included results of the September and December 2003 meetings.

c. **Recreation.** The chair will convene a meeting to discuss scope of the Working Group and will report back to the RAC at the May 2004 meeting.

d. **Wild Horse and Burro.** The group discussed the challenges of achieving burro objectives with declining budgets. The RAC agreed to submit a letter to Elaine Zielinski that proposes BLM include more emphasis on burro issues in its MOU with the Wild Horse and Burro Foundation. A second letter will be developed for the RAC Chair, Frances Werner, to send to other RAC Chairs expressing concerns and soliciting their assistance in addressing WH&B issues at a future RAC Chairs meeting.

e. **Land Use Planning and Tenure.**

Mike Taylor gave an excellent status report of the state-wide land use planning efforts. Regarding a question on funding for planning, Mike confirmed that each planning effort had been funded though perhaps not at the level desired. Regarding BLM's efforts to solicit cooperating agencies for each plan, it was suggested that conservation districts be included. The RAC also requested BLM

discuss its process for evaluating citizen wilderness proposals at a future RAC meeting.

f. Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV). The group reported that a proposed route plan had been developed for the Middle Gila Conservation Partnership area. A workshop held by the Forest Service and BLM at the National Training Center was very beneficial. It was recommended that Les Weeks conduct another Decision Tree session.

Sears Point Tour. On February 19th, the RAC traveled to the Sears Point cultural resource site east of Yuma near the Gila River. At the site, the RAC received presentations by RAC members Lorraine Eiler and Tina Clark and Yuma Field Office archaeologist Sandra Arnold which highlighted the historical and archaeological significance of the site and its abundant cultural resources. RAC members were led on a walking tour of the site and viewed a fascinating array of archaeological sites including distinctive petroglyph panels, rock alignments, and aboriginal trails. RAC members were very impressed by the site and thanked Lorraine, Tina, and Sandra for their efforts to interpret and explain the site's features. Protection of this unique site is very important and is being enhanced by BLM's efforts to consolidate ownership of lands in the Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Highlights of RAC Meeting in Wilcox, AZ, and Tour of Muleshoe Ranch Cooperative Management Area, May 26-27, 2004

On May 26th, a RAC business meeting was convened at the Best Western Plaza Inn

in Wilcox, AZ. Elaine Zielinski, BLM Arizona State Director, welcomed the group and gave a summary of legislation, regulations, and statewide issues. A synopsis of topics covered by Elaine Zielinski's report is as follows:

Fire Situation. BLM is expecting a bad season. Safety issues have grounded 33 air tankers. Two military tankers have been made available.

Klump Update. Mr. Klump has agreed to remove cows from allotments as ordered by the court. There will be a hearing to resolve settlement issues.

Military Affairs Commission. There is a potential role for BLM in helping to resolve encroachment and development issues through land exchanges. BLM's goal though is not to get involved in managing buffer lands (predominantly agricultural uses).

100th Anniversary of Antiquities Act. Plans are moving forward to commemorate the Act with on-the-ground events.

National Land Tenure Strategy. Goal is to enhance multiple use objectives and public access, protect significant resource values, and dispose of lands to accommodate community needs.

National BLM Director's Visits to Arizona. Director Clarke visited Arizona for the national RAC Chairs meeting and on another occasion to tour border areas and see issues firsthand. She met with Border Patrol and gained a better understanding of the impacts of illegal immigration.

RAC Nominations. Ten nominations have been received for upcoming positions on the RAC.

BLM Arizona Reorganization. Elaine discussed the background and reasons for achieving organizational efficiency. Principles and guidelines include better customer service, getting decisions closer to the ground, consistency in policies (but not a one-size-fits-all), improving funding available for the field level, optimizing use of resources, more

sharing of skills across boundaries, workforce planning (80% of managers and 45-55% of workforce will be eligible to retire in next 5 years), improving opportunities for mentoring employees, no forced moves, and no one loses their job. Carl Rountree discussed the new District Offices and displayed a map of the proposed district boundaries. The District level will alleviate the problem of too many decisions going to the State Office. District Offices will have about 11-12 personnel with a GS-14 Director. Field Office Managers will go to GS-13 level. Implementation will occur over time as opportunities arise. The RAC had several questions but appeared supportive of the proposal.

Next, Beau McClure, Special Assistant to the State Director, gave a presentation on **Border Issues**. His presentation was very informative in illustrating the major impacts of illegal immigration along the border and actions underway by BLM and the Borderland Task Force to address the issues. Priorities have been established for employee and visitor safety, improved communications, saving migrant lives, and developing a coordinated plan for Arizona. The Task Force goals include: regain safety and confidence, protect natural and cultural resources, improve coordination and cooperation of government agencies, increase awareness of illegal immigrant impacts, reduce deaths of illegal immigrants, and seek necessary funding. Next steps include Southwest Strategy approval of outreach materials and presentations to OMB and Congress.

Next, Ken Mahoney, BLM Wilderness Coordinator, discussed **Citizen Wilderness Proposals** for various land use planning efforts. Using a map, he summarized the proposed wilderness areas

across the state, most of which were submitted by the Arizona Wilderness Coalition. These proposals will be evaluated and reviewed in the planning process using BLM's criteria. Ken discussed the 2 step process: assessment/inventory and development of alternatives. He explained how Instruction Memorandum 2003-275 guides BLM in evaluating lands with wilderness characteristics. Through the planning process BLM may manage lands using special measures and prescriptions to protect wilderness characteristics. However, BLM cannot designate Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Once the land use plan is done, it would be up to citizens to work with their Congressional delegation to get legislation establishing an official wilderness area.

During the **Public Comment** period, the RAC heard from various members of the public. One individual discussed the Sky Island Alliance's work with BLM in closing roads in Las Cienegas and the challenges they are facing with illegal immigration and drug smuggling. He also voiced concern with proliferation of off-road vehicles and need to protect wild areas. Another individual discussed his work as Range Coordinator with the Arizona Cattlegrowers Association (ACA). The ACA is concerned about resource conditions and wants to help in areas that they can control. They can assist with education efforts and teaching ranchers about new techniques and monitoring methods. Another individual who is Co-Chair of the Public Lands Council of the ACA discussed their efforts to standardize monitoring on the range. RAC member Lamar Smith noted the efforts of the Society for Range Management to foster consistency across agencies and emphasized the importance of a uniform system for monitoring.

Next, Gregg Simmons, BLM Planning

and Environmental Coordinator, gave a comprehensive overview of the **Land Use Planning Process**. He discussed the legislation and BLM regulations that govern planning, the RMP level decisions, and the steps leading to selection of the preferred alternative and proposed RMP/EIS. He also discussed the implementation and monitoring phase after the plan is approved.

Gregg fielded questions from the RAC and mentioned the upcoming availability of E-planning. Next, Shela McFarlin updated the RAC on implementation of the Las Cienegas NCA Plan and discussed the FY2004 Annual Work Plan and Funding Summary. Teri Raml then gave an update on the North Phoenix planning effort. There have been many community workshops and extensive public input has slowed the process. Funding for contract support has run out. Teri hopes to have the draft plan ready by October 2004. The Phoenix Field Office is now producing a quarterly report summarizing its new and ongoing land management activities. This is a work in progress and Teri solicited the RAC's feedback. RAC members were very positive about the increased opportunities for public involvement and commended the progress being made by the Phoenix Field Office.

Next, Gregg Simmons gave an update on **Arizona's Statewide Fire Plan Amendment**. BLM received 7 comment letters and the proposed amendment does not appear controversial. BLM is proceeding with completion of the plan.

Next, Bill Ruddick, Arizona Land Exchange Coordinator, discussed the **Land Tenure Adjustment Process** and summarized a draft Arizona Lands Program Strategy. Bill provided background on the land exchange program and discussed the role of the Statewide Land Exchange

Steering Committee. Proposals must secure approval by the Committee, then approval by the State Director, and then are forwarded to the BLM Washington Office for review and approval. Current land exchange proposals include the Dos Pobres-San Juan project, a proposal on the Arizona Strip, and a proposal with ASARCO. The Baca Bill allows BLM to sell public lands at auction and use the proceeds to purchase certain types of lands such as in-holdings with exceptional resource values. Lands to be sold must have been identified for disposal when the Baca Bill was signed. BLM's strategy appears to be leaning toward more use of the Baca Bill and less emphasis on land exchanges. RAC members discussed concerns regarding BLM acquiring buffer lands for military purposes and the possibility of inflated land values driving up the price. However, BLM is providing information to the Congressional delegation so that they can make intelligent decisions on the potential impacts of each parcel.

Next, the Tucson Field Manager, Shela McFarlin, discussed her proposal to expand the Tucson RRT from 6 to 9 members to obtain broader representation in recreational use. She passed out a handout with details on the RRT membership and biographical information on the proposed new members. The RAC supported her proposal as presented.

During discussion of the **Field Manager Reports**, Frances Werner summarized results of a public meeting held in Tucson regarding recreational shooting opportunities. There is public distrust and antagonism to the Forest Service for closing a Tucson gun range. Breakout sessions were held to develop ideas. Two major themes: developed ranges and designated places safe to go for open shooting. Regarding the Phoenix Field Office's study of grazing impacts, Teri Raml reported that the Nature Conservancy

(TNC) is conducting a literature review. She will share that with the RAC. Lamar Smith offered to provide input to the study. RAC members expressed concern that the TNC effort could have bias and there should be others also collecting data.

RAC Working Group Reports.

a. **Standards and Guidelines.** The Working Group met to discuss the process for evaluating rangeland health. Concern was expressed that conclusions drawn didn't always follow through from the data. Decisions were made but not justified by the field assessment. There was consensus that BLM should review existing practices and emphasize the standards and guidelines process.

b. **Public Relations.** The next RAC Notes will include results of the February and May 2004 meetings and will be published in August.

c. **Recreation.** The Working Group has identified two potential issues: recreational site development and recreational shooting. They will meet with Don Applegate before the next RAC meeting to discuss how best the RAC could be involved. Also, there is a BLM national strategic plan for recreation and tourism which Deborah Stevens will provide to the RAC.

d. **Wild Horse and Burro.** The Working Group discussed the letter to Elaine Zielinski. It should be an agenda item for the next national RAC meeting. Al Burch noted that the MOU between BLM and WH&B Foundation had been signed but a copy is not yet available. He also handed out a summary of FY2004 accomplishments and discussed efforts to secure additional funding via reallocation of funds from other

BLM programs. Burro removal goal is 300-400 animals but only 190 have been removed due to budget shortfalls.

e. **Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV).** The Working Group has been working with Bill Gibson on a template for an Adopt-a-Trail program. The group's efforts will be turning toward standards and guidelines for OHV. The BLM national strategy for OHV cited the need to develop an OHV toolbox – this needs to be pursued.

f. **National RAC Chairs Meeting.** Frances Werner gave a summary of key points of discussion at the recent meeting. The Sustaining Working Landscapes initiative has been put on the back burner, which is a big disappointment to the RAC Chairs. Listing of the sage grouse is a big issue which will impact oil and gas leases. Other discussion items included the RAC's involvement in educating the public on fire management, damage caused by OHVs, wilderness policy and RS 2477, and RAC member conflict of interest. There will be a RAC member handbook coming out this fall. Director Clarke fully supports the RAC concept and believes RACs perform a very important role as the link between BLM managers and the public.

Muleshoe Ranch Cooperative Management Area Tour. On May 27th, the RAC met at the TNC Muleshoe Ranch headquarters. Bill Civish, Safford Field Office Manager, gave an introduction to the area and some history of BLM's planning efforts. TNC personnel then discussed the significant natural resource values of the area and ongoing work by the TNC to study and enhance the Muleshoe Ranch eco-system. The RAC then drove to designated sites along the Jackson Cabin road to view and discuss TNC/BLM prescribed fire accomplishments. BLM and TNC personnel fielded RAC member questions and discussed

how prescribed fire can be a tool for removing invasive species and improving grassland conditions. Tangible evidence of the beneficial effects of prescribed fire was observed on treated parcels and compared to adverse conditions on non-treated parcels. Upon completion of the tour, the RAC expressed appreciation for the opportunity to visit the area and view firsthand the important work being accomplished.

Next RAC Meeting Set for August 18, 2004

The Arizona RAC invites the public to attend its regularly scheduled RAC meetings. The next meeting will be held August 18, 2004, at the BLM National Training Center in Phoenix, AZ.

RAC Membership

Following is the list of *newly-appointed, **reappointed and current RAC members, the category they represent, and their place of residence. Each member's terms are for 3-years, and are staggered.

Commodity Category (5 members)

*Ty Kelly, Grazing, Wickenburg, AZ - Term Ending 9/06

Lee Aitken, Energy/Minerals, Tucson, AZ - Term Ending 9/04

**Sandra McCullen, Off-Road Vehicle Use, Mesa, AZ - Term Ending 9/06

Stephen Saway, Off-Road Vehicle Use, Sierra Vista, AZ - Term Ending 9/05

Rick Holloway, Commercial Recreation, Lake Havasu City, AZ - Term Ending 9/04

Non-Commodity Category (5 members)

Glendon Collins, Dispersed Recreation, Phoenix, AZ - Term Ending 9/05

William Branan, Environmental, Elgin, AZ - Term Ending 9/04

Sanford Cohen, Dispersed Recreation, Prescott, AZ - Term Ending 9/04

*Tina Clark, Historical/Archaeology, Yuma, AZ - Term Ending 9/06

Frances Werner, Dispersed Recreation, Tucson, AZ - Term Ending 9/05

Local Area Interests (5 members)

*Lawrence Nelson, Elected Official, Yuma, AZ - Term Ending 9/05

**Lorraine Eiler, Native American Tribes, Glendale, AZ - Term Ending 9/06

Lamar Smith, Academia, Benson, AZ - Term Ending 9/05

Mary Dahl, Public-At-Large, Rio Rico, AZ - Term Ending 9/04

*Peggy Titus, Public-At-Large, Mayer, AZ - Term Ending 9/06

Richard Hubbard is the Governor's representative to the RAC. Frances Werner is chair for the Arizona RAC.

For Further Information

If you have any questions about the RAC, contact Deborah Stevens, BLM Public Affairs Specialist, at the BLM Arizona State Office, 222 North Central Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85004-2203, or call 602-417-9215. For the latest approved RAC Meeting Minutes, check BLM's External Home Page @ www.az.blm.gov

About RAC Notes

RAC Notes is published periodically by the RAC Public Relations Working Group to provide the public with information related to current RAC activities and public land issues. To get on the mailing list, please contact Deborah Stevens at (602) 417-9215 or e-mail to Deborah_Stevens@blm.gov.

The RAC Notes is also posted on the BLM Home Page @ www.az.blm.gov under the News/Resource Advisory Council button.

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